

Return this book on or before the
Latest Date stamped below. A
charge is made on all overdue
books.

U. of I. Library

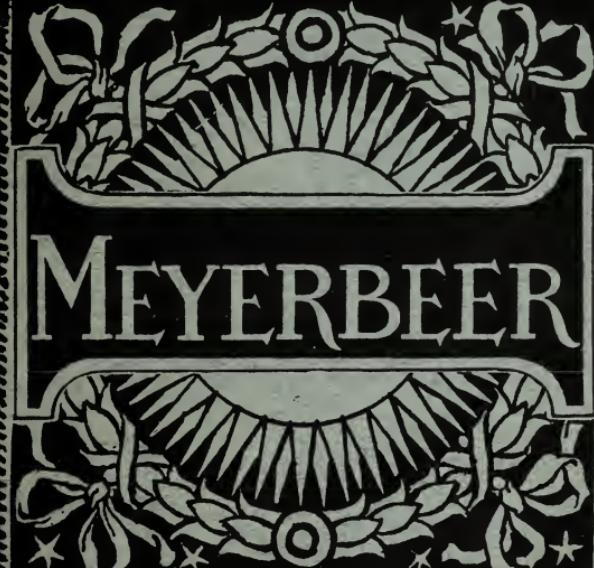
DEC 26 '35
AUG - 7 1940

8057-S
JOSEPH DENNETT

8057-S

NOVEMBER 1880

PRIMERS OF MUSICAL BIOGRAPHY



MEYERBEER



JOSEPH BENNETT



LETTERS FROM BAYREUTH

BY
JOSEPH BENNETT

Special Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

Price One Shilling.

In addition to a notice of the performance at Bayreuth in 1876, this work contains a full description of the plot of Wagner's greatest *Musik-Drama*, a critical notice of the music, and a full discussion of the artistic principles involved.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS:—

“Mr. Bennett is well-known to English musicians as one of our ablest critics. A musician himself, he adds to remarkable insight and critical judgment—intensified by long experience—the gift of a fine, lucid, and nervous English style. . . . As a permanent record of these famous performances, Mr. Bennett's little book cannot be too highly recommended, and those amateurs who wish to have a general idea of Wagner's theories will find them described in language less enthusiastic certainly than in the letters of the composer's avowed disciples, but without prejudice, and above all without a trace of intention to ridicule. . . . In the appendix are interesting sketches of Nuremberg and Salzburg, and an account of a visit to the graves of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert.”—*Manchester Examiner*.

“We find so much which we can cordially endorse that we have great pleasure in recommending the little volume as an interesting record of the important events which it describes.”—*Academy*.

LONDON & NEW YORK
NOVELLO, EWER AND CO.

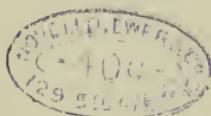
NOVELLO'S PRIMERS OF MUSICAL BIOGRAPHY.

GIACOMO MEYERBEER

BY

JOSEPH BENNETT.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.



LONDON & NEW YORK
NOVELLO, EWER AND CO.

May also be had cloth gilt, price Two Shillings.

NOVELLO, EWER AND CO.,
TYPOGRAPHICAL MUSIC AND GENERAL PRINTERS,
1, BERNERS STREET, LONDON (W.)

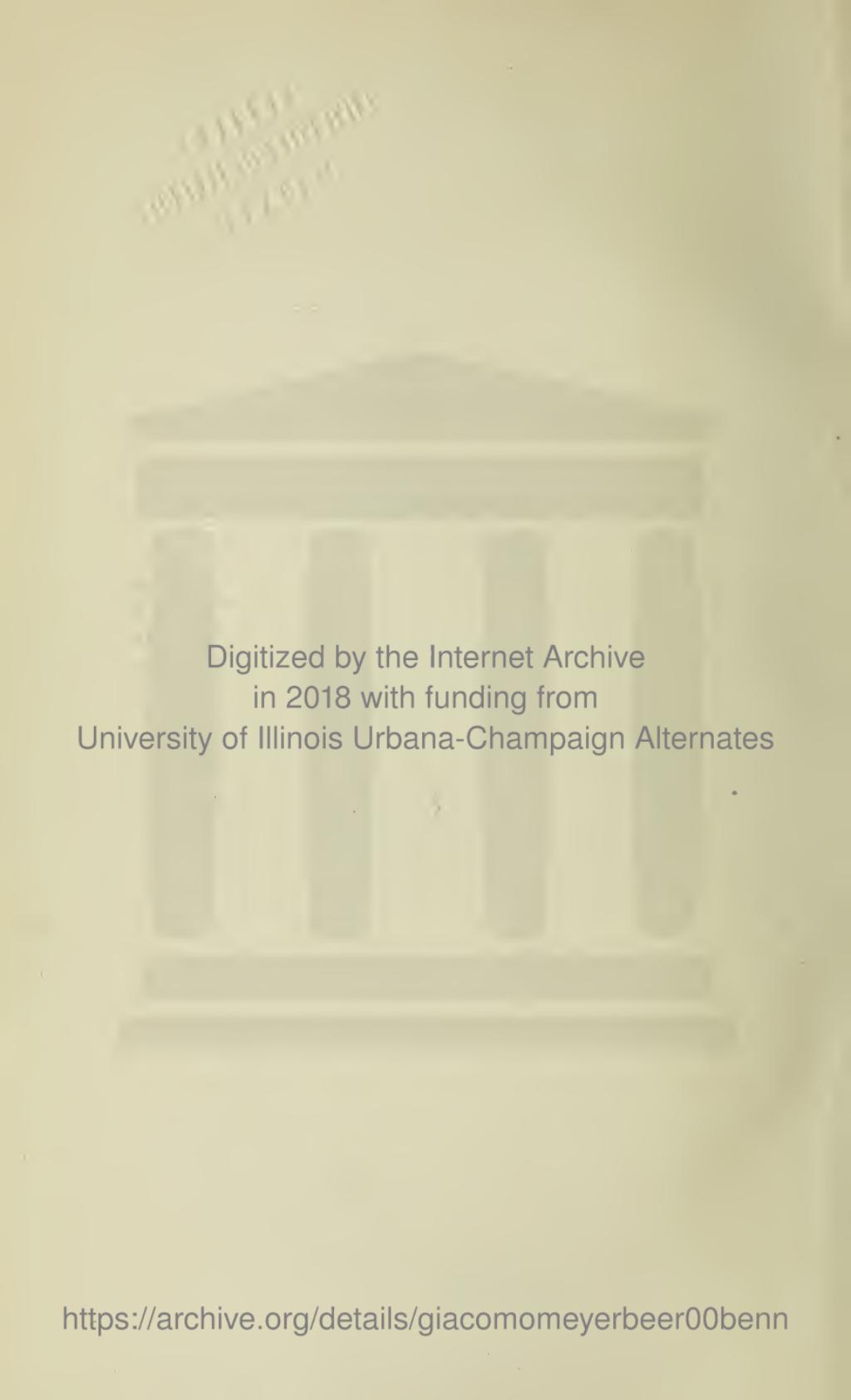
780.923
M576

3 Jy 22 Hutchins

EXTRACT FROM THE PROSPECTUS OF THE SERIES:—

“The intention of NOVELLO'S PRIMERS OF MUSICAL BIOGRAPHY is to convey, as clearly as the limits of an elementary work will allow, a just idea of each composer's personality, and to record the principal events of his life. Knowledge of what a man is helps the understanding of what he does. These little books may serve, therefore, as a first step towards acquaintance with the genius and compositions of the masters to whom they are devoted.”

8 45790



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates

<https://archive.org/details/giacomomeyerbeer00benn>



GIACOMO MEYERBEER.

THE date of Giacomo Meyerbeer's birth, like that of many other eminent musicians, is matter of dispute. M. Blaze de Bury, who had ample opportunity to question the master on the subject, gives it as 1794, and M. Fétis is on the same side, but others hesitate between 1794 and 1791. The difference is little, and signifies less; enough that shortly after the eighteenth century had entered upon its last decade, a son and heir was born to Herr Beer and Amalie Wulf, his wife. Beer, a rich Jew banker of Berlin, does not appear to have made any mark save as a rich Jew banker. He moved to Berlin from Frankfurt, and was, no doubt, a worthy member of a proverbially shrewd fraternity, none of whom ever slept without keeping one eye open and steadily fixed upon the "main chance." But if Herr Beer was merely a successful man of business, his wife took higher rank. She appears to have been a true "mother in Israel"—one of those grand characters in whom we still recognise the heroic outlines of the women of the Bible. With great faith and a large heart, of austere morals and tenderest feelings, Amalie Beer was just the woman to have great sons, and to develop in them the qualities they derived from herself. The mother's influence over her eldest boy was immense. She loved him passionately and guided him wisely, while he, in return, felt for her absolute veneration. A characteristic story is told of their relationship in after life. Just before "Robert le Diable" was produced in Paris, Meyerbeer received from his mother a letter marked "To be opened after the first

representation of ‘ Robert.’ ” In returning from the theatre at the close of an eventful night, the composer eagerly broke the seal and read :—

The Lord bless thee and keep thee. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord cause His face to shine upon thee and give thee peace.

Profoundly touched at receiving, under such circumstances, the ancient benediction of his people, Meyerbeer ever afterwards kept the letter on his person as a talisman. This tender love of mother and son continued till Amalie Beer was called to the reward of her faithful service, and it would be well if the letters she wrote to the composer during the years of their separation were collected and given to the world. Other sons she had, and two of them became eminent—one, Wilhelm, as an astronomer (he made a famous map of the moon); the other, Michael, is still remembered by his dramas, “ *Parià* ” and “ *Struensee*, ” for the last-named of which Jacob Beer composed music.

It is said that young Jacob showed musical tendencies at the very early age of four years. We do not lay too much stress upon this. All infants are wonders, more or less, in the eyes of the home circle, and record of their precocity is duly made for the benefit of a posterity which shall have learned to admire their developed greatness. Let it stand, however, that the baby Beer picked out upon the pianoforte tunes he had invented or heard in the street, accompanying them with such harmony as instinct prompted him to make. Father Beer—unlike his fellow Hebrew, Father Mendelssohn, sixteen or seventeen years later—was pleased to note in his little son such signs of a true vocation, and straightway put the child under one Lauska, a pupil of Clementi, and a favourite teacher in the Prussian capital. Under his care the little fellow soon developed into a prodigy. All his friends, being sensible people, were proud of him, and one, Meyer (or Mayer), went so far as to leave him a considerable fortune on condition that he assumed the benefactor’s name. In consequence of this Jacob Beer became Jacob Meyer Beer—afterwards Italianised and consolidated into Giacomo Meyerbeer.

It may be that the pride of the Beers in their young scion was greater than the wisdom that regulated it, even than the wisdom of the good mother who must have consented to the

public appearance of her boy when he was only in his seventh year. One is reminded of baby Mozart by the apparition on a public platform of this little Hebrew, at a time when he should have been in the nursery eating bread and butter and generally building up a sound fleshly temple for the spirit that was in him. Genius, however, must not be submitted to ordinary rules, and so probably thought the Beers as they decked out little Jacob for the show. The child played at a concert given on October 14, 1800, and obtained the honour of a flattering press notice. What did he play? Only the D minor Concerto of Mozart! At any rate, so declare his biographers, and those who doubt may consult the contemporary journals for satisfaction. Young Meyerbeer appeared again in December, 1803, and January, 1804, by which time he had become famous, and was spoken of as one among the best pianists in Germany. His execution was facile and correct, his style elegant, his grasp of the work set before him firm and comprehensive to a marvellous degree considering his age, and he could improvise with rare power, although, as he had never taken lessons in harmony, his progressions were not always correct. Owing to his growing repute, little Jacob came under the eye of two remarkable men at this period. Abbé Vogler saw and heard him, and prophesied for the youthful Israelite a brilliant career, while Clementi was so struck that, despite an aversion to teaching, he gave him lessons during the whole of his stay in Berlin. All this the Beers noted and were glad of their first born. "The Lord hath blessed him," said the fond mother.

Meyerbeer was about twelve years old when his parents placed him under a master for harmony and composition. Some biographers tell us* that he was first sent to Zelter, "whose rigid severity was insupportable to the young prodigy." This statement, however, derives no authority from Fétis or Blaze de Bury, who assert that Bernard Weber first took young Jacob in hand. Weber—who must not be confounded with Carl Maria's friend, Gottfried of that ilk—had a high position in Berlin, where, indeed, he reigned as *chef d'orchestre* at the Opera. He was a pupil of Abbé Vogler, but, according to Fétis, did that eminent contrapuntist little credit. The authority just named states that, while able to enlighten his pupils in matters of taste and

* See article "Meyerbeer" in Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

style, Weber was a weak harmonist, and so far unacquainted with the different kinds of counterpoint and fugue as to be a very incompetent teacher. In these matters Meyerbeer tried to teach himself, and out of this arises a story, which we may allow Fétis to tell :—

One day he (Meyerbeer) brought a fugue to his teacher, and Weber was so struck that, proclaiming it a masterpiece, he sent it off to Vogler, as a proof that he also could turn out learned pupils. For some time there was no reply, but at length came a voluminous packet which was opened with ardour. O doleful surprise! instead of the hoped-for praises was found a kind of treatise on fugue, written by Vogler, and divided into three parts. The first part succinctly laid down the rules for the construction of a fugue; the second, entitled “*The Pupil’s Fugue*,” contained that of Meyerbeer, analysed in full and proved to be anything but good. The third part, called “*The Master’s Fugue*,” contained one by Vogler himself on the theme and counter-subjects of Meyerbeer. It was also analysed, bar by bar, the master setting forth reasons why he had adopted such and such a form and no other.

In this elaborate manner did the Abbé abate the pride of his ex-pupil—no doubt deriving a grim satisfaction from the process. As to whether he was right or wrong, connoisseurs can judge for themselves, the paper having been published as a “*System für den Fugenbau*.” In any case, it had a great effect upon Meyerbeer. The scales fell from his eyes, and he saw what Bernard Weber had never been able to make clear. At once the lad set about composing a fugue in eight parts. This he himself sent to the Abbé, who wrote back: “There is a great future for you in art. Come to me, come to Darmstadt; I will receive you as a son, and will cause you to drink from the fountains of musical knowledge.” There was no more question of Bernard Weber after this. The boy set his heart upon going to Vogler, and his indulgent parents were not long in granting his prayer. Jacob was fifteen when he went to Darmstadt.

Abbé Vogler was a curious individual. He had in his nature more than a little of the charlatan; he was vain to excess, and subordinated the better part of himself to the unworthy object of making a figure in the eyes of the world. Educated by the Jesuits, he knew how to touch the weak points of those whom he wished to turn to account; he imposed upon the imagination by studied eccentricities, and trusted as much in tricks and dodges as in his undoubted

musical talent. Briefly, Vogler was a “bit of a humbug.” Till the Darmstadt period he had led a wandering life; turning up unexpectedly in the great European capitals, getting pupils round him (for he was a born teacher), and then suddenly vanishing—all for the purpose of exciting wonder and making talk. Vogler thus became a famous personage, and as such was much desired by Ludwig of Hesse, whom fate had made a Grand Duke but nature a Capellmeister. Ludwig’s Court was nothing if not musical, since every official and his family were obliged to play or sing, while his Highness himself acted as teacher and conductor. Naturally, Grand Duke Ludwig cast a covetous eye upon Abbé Vogler, who, once caught and secured, would make Darmstadt “like a city set upon a hill.” The Abbé was not unwilling to be caught for a consideration, and, a bargain concluded, he went to reside in the Grand Ducal capital, with the title of Privy Councillor, the grand cross of the Hessian order, a handsome pension, a good house, dinners and suppers from the Palace kitchen, and four wax candles a day. All these fine things consoled him for being, in a musical sense, kept at a distance by the Grand Duke. His Highness rejoiced to have Vogler attached to his Court, but wanted none of his advice, and went on drilling his artistic forces and conducting at the Opera in his own way. Meanwhile the Abbé was an imposing presence in the streets of Darmstadt. Baron Max von Weber writes:—

His appearance was not prepossessing, however. The old Abbé was short and corpulent; his features were strongly marked, but of no very friendly expression. His peculiarly long arms and enormous hands, which enabled him to stretch with ease two octaves on the organ, gave him somewhat the aspect of a large fat ape. Vanity was one of his ruling passions, and, vainer now than ever, he delighted to exhibit himself in all the elegance of black satin breeches, red silk stockings, and gold buckles in his shoes, with the great cross of the Order of Ludwig on the left breast of his rich broad black coat, and his black silk ecclesiastical mantle jauntily hung over his right shoulder.

Such was the man to whom young Meyerbeer went as pupil to master.

Through Max von Weber we get a good view of Jacob as he was on entering Abbé Vogler’s school:—

In the Abbé’s house Carl Maria (von Weber) was destined, moreover, to make acquaintance with another young musical

genius as yet unknown to him. This was Jacob Mayer Beer (more generally known under the name of Meyerbeer), the son of a rich banker in Berlin. Meyerbeer was then scarcely sixteen years of age, but his eminent musical talents had developed themselves so early that he already possessed a very considerable reputation as a pianist. He was now studying music under the Abbé Vogler, in whose house, for the better furtherance of his labours, he was lodged and boarded. His master was enchanted with his unwearying industry and zeal, his restless activity, and his almost incredible quickness of conception, which, in all the technical portion of the science, seemed to amount to divination. Although but a boy as yet, he possessed such powers of execution on the piano that he might already have earned a handsome independence as a professional performer had not fortune raised him above any such necessity. He was able to play the most elaborate instrumental scores at sight, with a full mastery of every part, which amounted to the marvellous, and this peculiar talent he was accustomed to exercise upon the principal scores of all the great masters, which he was fortunate enough to possess, bound with care, in his great musical library, to the envy and to the great benefit also of his young fellow-labourers. So untiring was his industry that, for weeks together, he would never leave his room or put off his dressing gown, when fascinated by some new branch of musical study. His four-part "Sacred Songs of Klopstock" had already been published, and had entitled him to respect as a composer. Such was the insignificant looking boy-artist, Meyerbeer, at this period. His amiable and friendly disposition soon attracted him to the young, joyous, animated, high-spirited, "sucking" maestro, who had dashed over from Mannheim, although his colder and more reserved North German nature was never able to express that warmth and more demonstrative affection which had bound Carl Maria's expansive heart to such friends as Gänsbacher.

The musician just named—the dear and life-long friend of the composer of "Der Freischütz"—was also studying under Vogler at this time, so that young Meyerbeer had companions of his own age in his new home, which seems, indeed, to have been a happy one. Vogler's system of teaching was highly stimulative in character, its main features being severe critical attacks upon every exercise, the author of which had to defend it as best he could, and was, therefore, most unlikely to put anything down without thought as to how he would meet the demand for a reason. Regularly, after morning mass, the Abbé met his pupils to give them an oral lesson in counterpoint; and then he

announced a theme or themes for development in one or other of the musical forms. Later in the day these exercises were taken one by one and severely analysed by the master, who also required the pupils to do the same. Then, perhaps, Vogler and the boys would sally forth to the cathedral, where were two organs, at each of which a pupil was placed with orders to improvise in turn against the other on some given theme, the old Abbé, who was accounted the best organist in Germany, winding up with an effusion of his own. Weber used to say in after years that—

Never did the Abbé pour forth such wondrous angel-tones or thunder peals on the instrument, in such rich beauties of fancy, as when he thus sat and played alone for his “three dear boys.”

Life at Darmstadt was not all hard work, though the lads had to make play for themselves. The Grand Ducal capital was a very severe and formal place at that time, and terribly dull. “I only take up my goose-quill,” writes Weber in one of his letters, “to tell you in the dullest words, how dull I feel in this dull Darmstadt.” Nevertheless, Vogler’s boys contrived a good deal of fun, for, thank heaven, “youth will be served.” Sometimes they would enter a beer garden, where Weber, standing on a table and twanging his guitar, would sing “roguish songs,” to the huge delight of the public. Anon they would go out “melody hunting”—picking up snatches of popular tunes for the purpose of expanding and beautifying them. To this, it is said, we owe the theme of Weber’s “*Invitation à la Valse*.” Or they would sit on a public bench and eat cherries for a wager, or take Mam’selle, Weber’s dog, with them, and call the creature’s name whenever a young lady passed, to enjoy seeing her look enquiringly round. Occasionally the lads would go to Heidelberg or Mannheim and drink more wine than was good for them. Merry parties they had in the two old towns, a special feature always being the improvisation of Meyerbeer and Weber on two pianofortes, one taking up the other in the middle of a passage or interrupting his cadences with incongruous matter. This fun over, the entire company would fall upon Meyerbeer’s Berlin delicacies (Father Beer kept his son well supplied with hampers of good things) and often young Jacob found it difficult to get a scrap for himself.

In such manner young Jacob passed two happy years, for,

with all his faults of taste and temper, the old Abbé secured the love of his pupils, by whom he was invariably called Papa. On one occasion the lads resolved to do their master's birthday special honour by jointly composing an ode. Weber acted as poet, a distinction for which lots were drawn, and also wrote a part of the music, the rest being done by Meyerbeer and Gängsacher—the share of the former being a terzet and chorus, of which we read, "Nothing, even at that time, could exceed the glow and simple fervour of the boy Meyerbeer's birthday composition." Amateur performers, among them Jacob's sister, Theresa, were easily obtained in the town, and on the morning of the day, Vogler being busy at the Opera rehearsing his "Samori," his apartments were decorated by the three pupils, and a banquet prepared. By and by the old Abbé returned home to be astonished at the aspect of things—at the music and the feasting, the lights and the flowers. Unhappily he was out of temper. The Grand Duke had taken no notice of the event, and the old man's vanity, deeply wounded, would not permit him to be gracious even to the loving attentions of his "dear boys."

The Grand Duke's slight upon Vogler may have had something to do with reviving the master's wandering spirit, but from whatever cause his restlessness increased. He desired once more to roam from city to city, and have the fire of his vanity fed by new admirers. But he would take his boys with him, and enlarge their experience of men and things, while continuing to watch over their musical development. The boys were naturally charmed with the idea, and in due time the little party left dull old Darmstadt for the comparatively reckless gaiety of Leipsic and Munich. But before quitting the Grand Ducal capital, young Meyerbeer produced a work and gained a distinction, the one being an oratorio entitled "God and Nature" (the manuscript score may be seen in the Conservatoire Library, Prague), the other the title of Court Composer. "God and Nature," let it be added here, was performed in Berlin, May 8, 1811, "at a concert given by Weber," says Fétis, but this Weber could not have been Carl Maria, who was then living in Munich. Carl Maria, however, had something to do with the oratorio, since he wrote a detailed criticism, or rather eulogy, afterwards pronounced by his son, Baron Max, to be "a sacrifice of truth to friendship."

Meyerbeer appears to have left Vogler at the close of their tour, and we next find him in Munich, where, at the age of eighteen, he produced a Biblical lyric drama, "The Daughter of Jephtha." The work was a failure, for reasons perfectly intelligible. Vogler's teaching had aimed at nothing more than scholastic perfection. It sought to make the pupil conversant with all the technical devices and operations of the art, but there was little culture of the imagination or of the power of dramatic expression. Hence "The Daughter of Jephtha" more resembled a series of exercises than an exposition of human feeling. It was, therefore, rejected by the public, and Meyerbeer received his first check. Authorities differ about his next work. According to the writer of the article "Meyerbeer" in Grove's Dictionary, our young master composed and produced at Munich a comic opera, "Alimelek, or the Caliphs," which made no success in the Bavarian capital, but was bespoken and put in rehearsal by the manager of the Kärnthnerthor Theatre, Vienna, a circumstance which drew Meyerbeer to the Kaiserstadt. This statement seems scarcely probable, or else the Vienna manager was an exception to the general run of his kind. Indeed, the writer observes in his next sentence that Meyerbeer went to Vienna "with the intention of making his appearance there as a pianist." Fétis says nothing about "Alimelek" at Munich, nor does Blaze de Bury, while in Max von Weber's memoir of his father, the opéra is spoken of as "given in Vienna under the title of 'The Two Caliphs.'" When Fétis does mention "Alimelek"—by the way, he calls it "Abimelek"—it is to tell us that the work was written to order in Vienna, consequent upon the success of a monodrame, entitled "The Loves of Theclinda," sung by Mdlle. Harlas. The truth, no doubt, is that Meyerbeer went to Vienna as a pianist, and not as a composer. At that time (1813) the Austrian capital was the headquarters of music. There alone could supreme distinction be gained, and all who were ambitious of it had to challenge the judgment of a public educated up to the highest point. Meyerbeer soon saw that, able player as he was, no immediate hope existed for him. On the very evening of his arrival in the city he heard Hummel play with the facility, exquisite *finesse*, and subtle charm that distinguished him. At once Meyerbeer formed a resolution. He would go into strict training and not show himself in

public till he could meet Hummel on his own ground. For ten months the young man persevered in carrying out this resolve, and then he challenged public judgment with striking success. Among those who heard him was Moscheles, who told Féétis that had Meyerbeer chosen to rely upon his talents as a *virtuoso*, few pianists would have stood a chance of successful rivalry. At this time the lad, for he was little more, composed a great many pianoforte pieces, some of which he committed to paper, but kept most of them in his memory only. Among his works at the early period under notice was also a symphony concertante for violin, piano, and orchestra.

Meyerbeer left Vienna under circumstances not unlike those which caused his departure from Munich. His "Abimelek" or "Alimelek," or "The Two Caliphs," was too old-fashioned and German for a public that had tasted the Italian music of Rossini, and it failed completely. The composer took his second check much to heart, but found a friend and comforter in Salieri, who had quite a fancy for the young Jew. Salieri's advice was the best possible for one who desired to succeed, and had no rigid musical principles as a preventive of elasticity in action. "You have learning enough," said Meyerbeer's counsellor; "Go to Italy and study how to write melodies for the voice. You possess the gift of tune, but do not know the instrument through which the theme finds expression. Learn it!" "I will," answered Meyerbeer, and he did.

It was in 1815 that Meyerbeer, acting on the advice of Salieri, went to Italy for the purpose of learning how to write for the voice. But before entering upon this second phase of his career, it may be well to cite the opinion of Carl Maria von Weber with regard to some of the work done in his first. We have already stated that Weber, who handled the pen of a critic as well as of a composer, wrote in assertion of his old fellow-student's claims. He did this especially as regards "Alimelek," and an article on that opera bearing his signature may be found in the *Musikalische Zeitung*, of Leipsic, for November 3, 1815. The *Musikalische Zeitung*, at that time edited by Rochlitz, had not, in Weber's opinion, done justice to Meyerbeer, and against this fact the future composer of "Der Freischütz" lifted up his testimony. After some sharp invective against his countrymen, who, with all

their pretended patriotism, neglected native talent, Weber said :—

Mr. Meyerbeer has hitherto acquired fame only as a great pianoforte player, while but little justice has been done to him as a composer. The great works by which he has proved his genius—the operas “Jephtha,” performed in Munich, and “Alimelek,” produced at Stuttgard and often at Prague, and his grand oratorio “God and Nature” have either been passed over in silence, or mentioned in terms of doubtful praise. . . . It is truly melancholy that a composer should be so often at the mercy of individuals whom either mere chance or the vanity of seeing themselves in print, or even hunger, has made the heralds and proclaimers of public opinion. How often is their judgment influenced by illiberal selfish motives. . . . The unity and keeping of the whole opera (“Alimelek”) is an advantage that few compositions like this possess. In addition to which, how many proofs of a devoted study of the art—what a beautiful combination of original melodies, in various forms, each preserving a character peculiar to itself! No prolixity in the work, all dramatically true, all full of lively imagination, of lovely and frequently luxurious airs. The declamatory part always correct, with an abundance of rich and new harmonies. A judicious use of the orchestra, often so combined as to produce the most striking effects. Such is this opera, from which I could easily select specimens to prove all that I have said if experience had not taught me that such passages when detached cease to be what they are in union, and therefore incapable of producing conviction.

Meyerbeer may have felt that he deserved these high encomiums, but, as we have seen, he willingly lent an ear to those who counselled a step certain to revolutionise his method. Already the composer had no artistic principle. Dazzled by the splendour of Rossini’s fame, he would become an Italian likewise, drink from the same fountain of tune, and set all the heads in Europe nodding to the measure of his rhythms. It was the end he regarded, not the means; and the adaptability of his race, so fiercely inveighed against by Wagner, made him not only willing to take any course, but able to take it with success. The situation becomes more accentuated when we recollect that, up to this time, Meyerbeer had been a strong opponent of Italian music, as represented by Nicolini, Pavesi, and others. Like most German musicians, he fretted against the preference shown to Italians at the multitudinous German courts, and had, therefore, a personal grievance wherewith to strengthen his

artistic dislike. Yet, spite of all, he went to Italy resolved to start along the flowery path of Italian opera towards the goal of fame. He could not have done so at a more propitious moment. On reaching Venice, he found the public wild with delight over Rossini's "Il Tancredi," which had just appeared to assert the existence of a new and brilliant genius, whose music was living music, not dry and soulless strains. "Il Tancredi" at once converted Meyerbeer, if indeed there could be involved in the case any such thing as real conversion. He saw his course marked out, and, just as at Vienna, he shut himself up to work hard and rival Hummel at the pianoforte, so now, with German patience and Jewish pliability he laboured unceasingly to follow, and, if haply he may, catch up Rossini. Meyerbeer was in no hurry to make an Italian *début*. Calculating, rather than enthusiastic, he could resist the promptings of impulse and eagerness. All the chances of success and failure were deliberately counted and weighed with the closest reference to his own judgment of himself, and hence it came to pass that his first Italian opera, "Romilda e Costanza," was not played till 1818. The Paduans, in whose city this event took place, gave the work a cordial reception, "not only," remarks Fétis, "because of the music and the talent of the *prima donna* (Pisaroni), but because Meyerbeer was considered by them as belonging to their own school, in his quality as a pupil of Vogler, himself the pupil of Valotti." "Semiramide riconosciuta," produced at Turin in 1819, followed, and after it came (Venice, 1820) "Emma di Resburgo," which at once established the master's reputation.* This opera soon travelled to Germany, where it proclaimed the composer's apostacy, and excited a storm of angry criticism. No wonder! German opera, thanks to Weber, whose strong nationality kept him intensely German, was lifting its head, and stirring up expectation. Every young composer had upon him the eyes of the people, looking to see that he did his duty, and loud was the outcry when

* The writer of the article "Meyerbeer" in Grove's *Dictionary of Music* has made a curious mistake here. He seems to have consulted Fétis, and there read: "En 1820, 'Emma di Resburgo,' autre partition de Meyerbeer, fut jouée à Venise et y obtint un succès d'enthousiasme, peu de mois après que Rossini y eut donné 'Eduardo e Cristina.'" But he read it so carelessly as himself to write: "'Eduardo e Cristina' and 'Emma di Resburgo' (Venice, 1820) were all received with enthusiasm by the Italian people," &c., as though Meyerbeer had composed both.

“Emma di Resburgo” showed on every page that Meyerbeer, whose German virtues Weber so loudly proclaimed, had gone over to the enemy. Weber himself shared this feeling to the fullest extent. He had failed to comprehend Rossini, just as, by the way, he failed to comprehend Beethoven, and waged against him and his school a bitter war which was, perhaps, as much national as artistic. One can easily imagine, therefore, his disgust at seeing a Rossinian in the German composer of whose talents he had warmly expressed a profound admiration. To such a heat did the feeling of resentment rise that it boiled over on to the pages of the Dresden *Gazette*, where we find an angry and protesting article. But the personal friendship of the two men remained unaffected, and evidence of this may be discovered in Weber’s letters, from which we make a single extract:—

On Friday last I had a great pleasure—Meyerbeer came and passed a whole day with me. . . . It was really a day of happiness—a souvenir of the happy time we spent together at Mannheim. We did not separate till far into the night. Meyerbeer goes to Trieste to produce his “Il Crociato,” and means to return to Berlin in a year to write a real German opera. Heaven grant that he keeps his word. As for me, I have talked to him conscientiously.

Weber did more than talk. As a practical protest against his friend’s desertion to the enemy, he put Meyerbeer’s opera, the “Two Caliphs,” on the Dresden stage, under the name of “Wirth und Gast,” intending thus to show that he had not praised his friend without cause, as well as to declare the road in which that friend should walk.

It would serve little purpose to dwell minutely upon Meyerbeer in Italy. This was not the true Meyerbeer, any more than the grub is the butterfly. Let us, therefore, simply record that “Emma di Resburgo” was followed by “Margarita d’Anjou,” that by “L’Esule di Granata” (1822), and that by “Almansar.” In 1823, Meyerbeer’s health not being good, he went to Berlin for a change, and there wrote a German opera, “The Brandenburg Gate,” intended, it is said, for the theatre at Koenigstadt, but never performed. It was this visit to his native city which brought about the pleasant intercourse with Weber, spoken of in the extract already given from the master’s letters. At this time, also, he completed his “Il Crociato”—a work produced, not at Trieste, but at Venice (1824), where it was received with

acclamation, the composer being presented with a laurel crown on the stage. So ended, with all honour, the master's Italian career, for he composed no more operas in the language of Rossini.

The works produced during this phase of Meyerbeer's career were not successes merely on the spot, though even such a limited result would have been creditable when Rossini was everywhere worshipped as a god. It says much that, against so powerful a rival, the young Berliner obtained a hearing at all. He did far more than obtain a hearing. For example, "Emma di Resburgo" was played at Venice, Milan, Genoa, Florence, and Padua, while, as "Emma von Leicester," it appeared in Vienna, Munich, and Dresden, and, as "Emma di Roxburg," at Berlin and Stuttgart. "Margarita d'Anjou" was performed in Italian at Milan, Venice, Bologna, Turin, Florence, and Trieste; in German, at Munich and Dresden; in French, at Paris and several provincial towns of France; and, in English and Italian, at London. Triumphs of this kind were surely enough for satisfaction, and Meyerbeer could not have been led by failure to abandon Italian opera. How then came he to abandon it? Probably through artistic dissatisfaction with results, which, if brilliant, were superficial; through the force of early training and dread of the opinion formed of him in Germany. Be this as it may, his last Italian work, "Il Crociato," shows a marked disposition to return to the German manner. On this subject Fétis observes:—

If one examines the score of "Il Crociato" with care, unequivocal signs appear of a reaction in the method of the composer and of an attempt to fuse his primitive tendencies with the Italian method of "Emma di Resburgo" and "Margarita d'Anjou."

The fact was noticed immediately on the production of the opera. Thus a correspondent of the *Harmonicon* (Vol. I., p. 160) wrote, after referring to the success of the piece:—

Yet envy and many a mortified *maestro* did their utmost to rob the German composer of his triumph. Such is the order of the day, but letters of impartial connoisseurs received from Venice and other quarters cannot sufficiently praise the music of this opera, which is of that profound and solid kind which at present seems confined almost exclusively to Germany.

Another correspondent of the same journal (Vol. III., p. 2), writing from Florence after "Il Crociato" had been produced

there, enters fully into the merits of the work, pronouncing it a “ happy amalgamation of the music of the German and Italian schools, full of well-digested and profound harmonies, blended with a spirited and expressive melody.” But more is gathered from this contemporary writer. We learn, for instance, that Meyerbeer’s peculiar individuality so asserted itself as to obtain notice and excite comment :—

It is true that in Meyerbeer’s music we sometimes meet with uncommon phrases, which will not at once be either relished or understood, but when heard often they enchant by their novelty and beauty, and strongly rivet the attention. It must be acknowledged by all that the compositions of this master not only please the ear, but also express a language that speaks directly to the heart. His music may be compared to some of those grave-looking persons who alarm us on a first introduction, but upon closer acquaintance charm us by the suavity of their manners, and the elegance of their conversation. One fault we may be permitted to find with this composer, but it is a “ happy one,” as Quintillian calls it, and this is a redundancy of genius. If he possessed self-denial enough to retrench these exuberances, if he would bear constantly in mind that great law, *ne quid nimis*, his music might approach rapidly to perfection.

These extracts amply suffice to show the significance of “ *Il Crociato*,” as the first work which gave a definite intimation of what its composer was destined to become.

“ *Il Crociato*” not only foreshadowed Meyerbeer’s ripened method, but had a remarkable influence upon his future career. The work was played in Paris in 1826, and the composer travelled to the French capital for the purpose of supervising the production. He little suspected, perhaps, the importance of that journey. It determined him as a writer for the French stage.

On reaching Paris Meyerbeer installed himself at the Hotel Bristol, and at once entered into the full enjoyment of Lutetian life. M. Blaze de Bury says :—

One saw him everywhere, at the theatre, in society, at the quartet evenings given in the Pillet-Will mansion, where Baillet had so much trouble then in gathering thirty people to hear the masterpieces of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. . . . Meyerbeer was soon on terms with all that music, the fine arts, letters, and society had of notabilities. He was full of respectful deference for the famous veterans of the Conservatoire; simple and cordial towards the celebrated men of his own generation; affable and encouraging towards talent still obscure.

With Rossini he soon established close relations. The composer of "Il Barbiere" recognised all the talent of the German master, and had no jealousy. To his honour be it said that Rossini kept free from that very professional meanness, as he did from ill-natured resentment. Who can forget his remark to Weber when the master approached him "delicately" (as Agag approached Samuel), with an uncomfortable recollection of how he had lampooned and burlesqued him. "Not a word more," exclaimed Rossini, replying to Weber's muttered excuses, "the *polisson* who wrote 'Tancredi' ought to think himself too happy that such a man as you made him the subject of your pen." There was Rossinian sarcasm here, undoubtedly, but so happily veiled that Weber, who saw no more in it than he wished to see, was put quite at his ease.

"Il Crociato" was set before the Parisians in due course, and in the best manner, with the aid of Pasta, Mombelli, Donzelli, and Levasseur, but it had no special success, and was no more than well received. Here, in parenthesis, let us show out of what conflicting elements the historian has to evolve truth. M. Fétis writes in his "Biographie Universelle":—

"Il Crociato" did not obtain in Paris the enthusiastic success it gained at Venice, Rome, Milan, Turin, and all over Italy, nor even such as it won later in Spain, at Lisbon, and at London, as well as in Germany. Circumstances were unfavourable. Paris does not divide its crowns, which fall upon a single head. In 1826 the frequenters of the Théâtre Italien did not believe that any other composer than Rossini was possible.

On the other hand, M. Blaze de Bury, after a panegyric on Paris as the supreme arbiter of fame, says:—

"Il Crociato" was produced under the most powerful auspices . . . its success bore the aspect of a triumph. At that time there was enthusiasm for all masterpieces, and laurels for all glory.

We elect to believe Fétis, who wrote as a contemporary of the event, and whose testimony accords with the established fact that when "Il Crociato" was produced in Paris, Rossini had the ear of the public to an extraordinary degree —had, in fact, a virtual monopoly of that organ.

After his French *début*, Meyerbeer kept silence for four years. Endowed with ample fortune, no need existed to work for bread, and he now seems to have bethought him of

social duties, and intimate family pleasures. In 1827 he took to himself a wife, and two children were quickly born to him—born only to die in babyhood. Meyerbeer keenly felt the loss of these infants, so brooding over the heavy affliction as to bring on a serious illness, from which he recovered with difficulty. Much of the artistic interregnum, we have good reason to suppose, was really spent in maturing the method and style that astonished the world in his next work. In the quietness of his home, when home was not the abode of overwhelming grief, the master worked out the manner and direction of a new departure, which, whatever its merits, gave him, for all time, a distinct and striking individuality among composers of opera. The work just referred to was “*Robert le Diable*”—first of the great series which ended with “*L’Africaine*.” Written by Scribe and Delavigne, the book of this opera has often been praised, on the strength, perhaps, of its authors’ names; but more often abused, as monstrous in conception, vulgarly sensational in working out. As far as the detractors are right, Meyerbeer should bear his meed of blame, since it is known that he reigned supreme over his poets, never accepting in deference to them what his judgment disapproved. In this very opera, for example, Scribe wished to bring on a lot of sea-nymphs, bearing golden oars, as the seductors of *Robert*. Meyerbeer rejected the idea and proposed, with characteristic boldness, the famous scene of the nuns. How bitterly this was attacked no student of musical literature needs to be told, while readers of Mendelssohn’s letters easily call to mind his amusing description of the entire plot. Mendelssohn was in Paris during the early run of “*Robert*,” and refers to the work as “played every night with great success,” adding, after a sketch of the story:—

I cannot imagine how any music could be composed on such a cold, formal *extravaganza* as this, and so the opera does not satisfy me. It is throughout frigid and heartless, and where this is the case no effect is produced on me. The people extol the music, but where warmth and truth are wanting I have no test to apply.

No considerations of the sort affected the Parisians, who revelled in the spectacular effects without question as to their reasonableness or propriety, and accepted all that seemed doubtful for the sake of music which spoke a new dialect of the universal language.

It will be of interest to reproduce here that which Féétis has said regarding Meyerbeer's second transformation, as revealed in "Robert le Diable":—

A new man is shown in this work. It is no longer the German Meyerbeer, the pupil of Vogler; it is no longer he of Italy, throwing violently off his scholastic habits in order to learn, by imitation of Rossini, the art of using the voice and instrumental colouring; it is not even the fusion of the two styles in order to attain varied effects; it is altogether a creation in which there remains to the artist, of his earlier periods, only the experience acquired by his labours. Six years of rest, or rather of study; six years of meditation, observation, and analysis, had at last co-ordinated and made into an original and powerful whole all the energetic feeling that nature had infused into his soul, all the novelty of idea born of audacity, all the elevation that the philosophy of the art lent to his style, and all the certainty that a practised mechanism gave to the effects which he desired to produce.

A French critic (Félix Clément) adds to the foregoing general and, in the main, correct remarks some more definite observations of an instructive character. He says ("Dictionnaire Lyrique") :—

Meyerbeer demonstrated in this work a powerful individuality and indicated a new horizon. He has dramatised the harmonic methods of the German school by a process which we can indicate but briefly. The expression of personal character and dramatic situation is in agreement. Its impression is more concise, more immediate than in the melodic phrase, which can only exert its influence after some bars. Enharmonic modulation is the master's most frequent resource in order to enter, without preparation, into the moral sense of his subject. From this manner of shaping the composition it follows that, wanting a text, a title, a canvas, a definite situation, the music of Meyerbeer does not interest, does not hold the attention so much as that of composers who strive less to paint with energy, precision, and all possible force the sentiments of humanity than to move the soul by constantly charming the ear and by the feeling of rhythm. For this reason the instrumental pieces of Meyerbeer are generally short. The æstheticism of his art did not invite him to precede his operas with developed overtures. His orchestration is admirable for science, resource, and dramatic intention, but it never unbends. Sonority, variety of *timbres*, all incessantly contribute to the effect. Let imitators of the master take care lest in pushing his system too far without the support of eminent quali-

ties, they act upon their audience in a manner more acoustical than musical.

Whatever opinion may be expressed for and against the new method of Meyerbeer, assuredly it pleased the taste of a time when romanticism in art was asserting itself against bondage to classicism, and that in Meyerbeer's novel rhythms, bewildering variety of effects, and highly coloured orchestration, they recognised an assertion of liberty which few valued the less because here and there it bordered upon license.

“*Robert le Diable*” was ready for representation in 1830, but the confusion brought about by the Revolution of July affected even the Grand Opéra, which was no longer under royal direction. The manager, left to himself, had to take care of himself, and he stipulated for terms so hard upon the composer that Meyerbeer declined to entertain them. By November of the following year affairs had settled down, and an arrangement to produce the work took effect without further trouble. With it the most splendid period in the history of the Académie Royale de Musique distinctly began, much to the surprise of the manager, who had listened to the sneers of the critics admitted to rehearsal. Fétis, who was present, tells us:—

A multitude of the professional critics, without sufficient knowledge of art, who abound in Paris more than anywhere else . . . cut up the musician's work in the gayest manner possible. It was who should say the most jocular word, or make the most grotesque and witty funeral oration over the score. They summed up by declaring that the piece would not run ten nights.

The poor manager (Dr. Véron) hearing all this went to Fétis and confided to him his doubts and fears.

“Don't trouble yourself,” said his friend, “I have listened attentively and feel sure I am not deceived. There are here many more beauties than imperfections. The spectacle is taking, the impression will be lively and profound. The work will rise to the clouds and make the round of the world.”

The manager may have found some comfort in these words, but yet more consoling were the ten thousand francs which “*Robert*” brought to the treasury night after night. The first performance took place on November 21, 1831, with the following cast: *Alice*, Mdlle. Dorus; *Isabelle*, Madame Cinti-Damoreau; *Raimbaut*, M. Lafont; *Robert*,

M. Nourrit ; *Bertram*, M. Levasseur. Success came, as we have seen, promptly and in abundance, and without a day's delay. Meyerbeer's first French opera began the march round the world predicted for it by Féétis.

The splendid result of the new operatic mixture invented by our master naturally led to an engagement for the production of another work. He accepted from Scribe and Emile Deschamps the book of "*Les Huguenots*," and bound himself under a penalty of 30,000 francs to present the score by a specified time. Already his fondness for altering and re-altering, and for taking the minute precautions which long kept "*L'Africaine*" from the public, had become so far known that it was deemed wise to bind him down. In this case, however, nothing availed against delay ; but the fault was not Meyerbeer's. The composer's wife, suffering from an affection of the lungs, was ordered to reside in Italy, and thither the master accompanied her in a state of great anxiety. He begged for six months' grace under the painful circumstances, but the favour was refused, upon which Meyerbeer paid the fine, and said to the manager, "Good-bye." This at once brought the operatic potentate to his knees. He approached Meyerbeer as a suppliant ; begging him to take the money back and let him have the score as soon as possible. To this the composer agreed, nothing loth to re-pocket his 30,000 francs, and "*Les Huguenots*" was first performed at the Academie Royale on February 21, 1836.

In view of the splendid triumph which "*Les Huguenots*" secured for the composer of "*Robert le Diable*," attention may fitly be drawn to some passages in a letter written by Meyerbeer as far back as 1823. At that time the master was following up his Italian successes, and, after his shrewd manner, looking out for artists best able to further the end he had in view. Thus he crossed the path of Levasseur, who was himself "preluding" in Italy. Meyerbeer at once discerned the French singer's capacity, and the letter now in question is chiefly taken up with remarks concerning a prospective engagement. This disposed of, Meyerbeer goes on to say :—

I am much flattered by that passage of your letter in which you speak of the favourable opinion the Director of the French Opéra is good enough to entertain regarding my feeble talents. You ask if writing for the French stage would have, for me, no

attractions. I assure you that I should more glory in the power and honour of composing for the French Opéra than for all the Italian theatres—to the chief of which I have already given works. Where, save in Paris, shall one find the immense resources which the French Opéra offers to an artist who desires to write really dramatic music? Here, one absolutely lacks operatic poems, and the public care for only one kind of music. At Paris, there are excellent poems, and I know that your public receive all kinds of music without distinction, so long as genius presents them. Hence, a field for the composer much vaster than in Italy. Perhaps you ask why, if I think thus, I have not sought to write for Paris. The fact is that I am told French opera is a difficult field; that one has usually to wait many years before a hearing comes, and hence I am afraid. I must say, also, that I have been drawn away from this point in Italy, where I am at present much sought after; although, I confess, this is more owing to the excessive indulgence of the public than to my small talent.

These remarks are of interest, not only because they show at what an early period Meyerbeer had in view the scene of his greatest triumphs, but because they were addressed to one of the artists who became closely identified with his successes, and were written under circumstances pointing to the careful way in which the master took precautions against failure. His dread of *fiasco* was almost a monomania, and we shall see by and by how many years he kept "*L'Africaine*" in his desk because no artist satisfied the conditions of executive efficiency imposed by great, if not exaggerated, prudence. Meyerbeer was certainly most fortunate at the Grand Opéra in the matter of his interpreters. He could not have been better suited had he bribed Nature and Art to do their very best on his behalf. Habeneck presided in the orchestra — Habeneck, the fortunate chief who produced "*Le Comte Ory*" and "*Guillaume Tell*" for Rossini, "*Masaniello*" for Auber, "*Robert*" and "*Les Huguenots*" for Meyerbeer, and "*La Juive*" for Halevy. Upon the stage were Mdlle. Falcon, Nourrit, and Levasseur; the trio of whom Meyerbeer was wont to say, "we shall never see the like again"; while in the Director the master found one who appreciated his vast designs and spared neither cost nor trouble to work them out. Never did an opera appear under better auspices than "*Les Huguenots*." It was "born in the purple," and fate and circumstances stood around its cradle wreathed in smiles. We need not refute the idea that happy conditions alone explain its success.

“Les Huguenots” lives now, fifty years, or nearly, after its production, but we who, with English eyes, witness it as given on an Italian stage can form no notion of the charm it had for Frenchmen in 1836. It satisfied their conception of what an opera should be. Thoroughly eclectic, it combined the variety of forms and effects which a German *pur sang* would never seek, with the largeness of style and close attention to detail such as an Italian would never give. Then its grandiose character, its originality, pomp, and passion, all shown with, so to speak, the limelight on them, charmed a people whose genius for the theatre finds expression in all they do.

Naturally, the severer school of musicians objected to Meyerbeer’s gorgeous, or, as they preferred to call them, meretricious, creations, and some of its members carried resentment to absurd lengths. We already know what Mendelssohn thought of his fellow Hebrew, but here comes in an amusing anecdote narrated by Ferdinand Hiller—also a Jew:*

Mendelssohn was often told that he was very like the composer of “Robert,” and at first sight his figure and general appearance did perhaps give some ground for the idea, especially as they wore their hair in the same style. I sometimes teased Mendelssohn about it, to his great annoyance, and at last one morning he appeared with his hair absolutely cropt. The affair excited much amusement in our set, especially when Meyerbeer heard of it, but he took it with his usual invincible good nature and in the nicest way.

Looking at Meyerbeer’s French development from a point of view diametrically opposed to that taken up by the classicists, Wagner professed to feel even a greater repulsion. He attacked Meyerbeer, as everybody knows, with exceeding bitterness—intensified, no doubt, by the fact of having received favours at his hands—and it may be fitting to give the substance of Wagner’s argument at this point. In “Opern und Drama,” the Bayreuth master declares the secret of Meyerbeer’s music to be “effect”—using the English word, not the German “Wirkung,” because he takes “effect” to mean “result without motive.” He distinctly asserts that “Meyerbeer’s music does, in fact, produce on those who are able to enjoy it a result without a motive.” The writer then continues, in language so involved that even

* Mendelssohn, Letters and Recollections, pp. 23-4.

an accomplished German scholar like Mr. J. V. Bridgeman can hardly make it intelligible :—

This miracle was only possible for the most external kind of music, that is to say, for a power of expression which (in opera) has, from the earliest period, been endeavouring to render itself more and more unworthy of expression, and proved that it had fully attained this independence by debasing the subject of the expression—which subject alone imparted to the latter being, proportion, and justification—to such a depth of moral as well as artistic nothingness that the subject itself could only obtain being, proportion, and justification from an act of musical caprice, which act had thus itself become denuded of all real expression.

The reader will hardly expect us to try and reduce to comprehensible terms this peculiarly Teutonic language. We leave it, therefore, as a nut for him to crack at leisure, and pass on to something more definite. In argument Wagner is always wordy and obscure, but in invective and vituperation he can be clear enough. Thus, there is no mistaking what he means below :—

Had I especially to characterise Meyerbeer's capability and vocation for dramatic composition, I should, out of regard for truth, which I exert myself completely to discover, bring forward most prominently a remarkable circumstance in his works. There is such frightful hollowness, shallowness, and nullity displayed in Meyerbeer's music that we feel inclined to set down his specifically musical competency at zero—especially in comparison with that of far the greater majority of contemporary composers. The fact that, in spite of this, he has achieved such great success with the operatic public of Europe must not fill us with astonishment, for this marvel is very easily explained by a glance at the said public, but purely artistic observation shall enchain and teach us.

Wagner goes on to admit that in some places Meyerbeer rises to “the pinnacle of the most undenial and greatest artistic power.” Those moments depend upon the poet and they come whenever—

the poet forgets his constrained consideration for the musician ; wherever, in his course of dramatic compilation, he involuntarily comes upon a moment when he can breathe in and again send forth the free refreshing human air of life, he suddenly wafts it as a source of inspiration to the musician as well, and the latter, who, after exhausting all the musical riches of his predecessors, cannot give a single gasp more of real invention, is now enabled,

all at once, to discover the richest, most noble, and most soul-moving musical expression.

Here Wagner attacks Meyerbeer's "poetical private secretary," Scribe, rather than Meyerbeer himself, because, it seems, Meyerbeer was capable of great things when the poet gave him a chance. Wagner goes on to cite an example which has, no doubt, already occurred to the reader's mind:—

I would especially call attention to several detached passages in the well-known and painful love scene in the fourth act of the "Huguenots," and, above all, to the invention of the wonderful and moving melody in G flat major, with which, springing as it does like a fragrant blossom from a situation that seizes on every fibre of the human heart with delicious pain, only very few, and only the most perfect portions of, musical works can be compared.

These words seem a handsome tribute to a brilliant and moving masterpiece, and Wagner professes to offer it with "most sincere joy and real enthusiasm." But he soon dissipates all the grace of his expressions by pointing out that Meyerbeer's success in the "Huguenots" duet simply proves that the "most corrupt maker of music" can, under the circumstances detailed above, be capable of real artistic creation. The author of "Opern und Drama" then goes on to say that, through an unnatural anxiety to represent his capability in the light of boundless power, Meyerbeer "reduced the said power, which is in truth most rich, to the most beggarly poverty, in which Meyerbeer's operatic music now appears to us." It would be interesting, but beyond our province now, to enquire how far these remarks recoil upon Wagner himself, as we have him in his latest manifestations. In some respects they are unjust to Meyerbeer, whose restless striving after effect sprang from no artistic vanity. Meyerbeer, we again point out, had the suppleness of his race. His artistic conscience was not "seared as with a hot iron," because there was not enough of it to lay an iron upon, and thus, unhampered by principles like those that made his fellow-Hebrew, Mendelssohn, so fastidious, he simply shaped the exercise of his genius to circumstances. French opera demanded sensational effects of the most gorgeous and variegated character, both musical and scenic, and that demand Scribe and Meyerbeer supplied in a measure only possible to the highest talents. Had the taste of Paris

declared itself for archaism on the lyric stage Meyerbeer would just as readily have gratified it, and, no doubt, with equal success.

Between the production of "Les Huguenots" (February 21, 1836) and that of "Le Prophète" (April 16, 1849), Meyerbeer composed nothing for the French stage. Several causes brought about this result. Féétis declares one to have been the progressive decline of singing power at the Grand Opéra, but others are obviously more important. Thus, the King of Prussia—he who was afterwards known by the irreverent as "Clicquot"—invited Meyerbeer to become his Chapelmaster. It is scarcely necessary to add that the offer found ready acceptance, and it must be admitted that Meyerbeer of "Les Huguenots" was a fit successor to Spontini of "La Vestale." Frederic William IV., though an indifferent king, had the tastes of an admirable dilettante. He was a literary and musical gormandiser, and never so happy as when sitting down to a table well loaded with artistic dainties. Almost as a matter of course, therefore, the King, struck by the Parisian success of his Hebrew subject, sought to attach him to his Court. He found Meyerbeer much more tractable than Mendelssohn, who had not the suppleness requisite for a courtier. Meyerbeer loved to be noticed by anybody—he would take pains to conciliate the smallest and most insignificant journalist—but especially did he value the smiles of the great. There was in his character something of the Orientalism that distinguished another famous Hebrew—Disraeli. He could "too" as well as Pertinax McSycophant himself, and he regarded a bit of riband in his buttonhole more than a jewel of price. So Meyerbeer flourished at the Berlin Court, becoming a prominent figure at the King's artistic and intimate *réunions*. "The King," says M. Blaze de Bury, "sitting at a table, amused himself by sketching architectural designs with a crayon, Tieck or Humboldt read, the ladies embroidered or picked out threads, and if the Countess Rossi (formerly Mdlle. Sontag), then wife of the Sardinian Minister at Berlin, was in the humour to sing, Meyerbeer accompanied on the pianoforte." The master's life, however, was not all "cakes and ale" of this kind. A good deal of hard work entered into it, and to the period now in review especially belong a number of compositions for church use. Among them are the 91st Psalm (published

with English words by Messrs. Novello & Co.), twelve Psalms for double choir, a "Stabat Mater," Miserere, and Te Deum, all of which are marked by Féétis as not printed. But Meyerbeer was in his true vocation when writing an opera for the opening of the new Royal Theatre (December 7, 1844).

A former edifice on the site of this structure had been built by Frederic the Great, and Rauch's equestrian statue of that monarch stood near it. Associations with the redoubtable warrior were therefore strong, and may have determined the subject of the book provided for Meyerbeer by Rellstab. In any case, the great Frederic was the hero of the new opera, "Ein Feldlager in Schlesien" ("A Camp in Silesia"). The composer had great hopes of success with his work. The theme appealed to national hero-worship, and Jenny Lind, then fresh from her native North, took the part of the heroine, *Vielka*. But the result did not bear out expectation. "Ein Feldlager" was, in fact, nothing but an *opéra de circonstance*, intended mainly to bring Frederic on the scene, and to display a military spectacle. The plot, therefore, was as simple as possible, and may be sketched in a few lines:—

The King, at war with Austria for the possession of Silesia, is pursued by the enemy, and takes refuge in the house of an old captain named *Saldorf*. Searched for on all sides, *Frederic* is saved by *Saldorf*, who makes his son exchange clothes with the royal fugitive. Once beyond reach of danger, the King makes liberal recompense to the devoted family.

Such is the story in outline, and we cannot be surprised that an opera of limited interest and purpose served its immediate object and no more. Meyerbeer, however, by no means allowed his music to run to waste. Much of it he afterwards introduced into "L'Etoile du Nord," notably the great military *ensemble* and the trio for voice and two flutes. By the way, *Frederic*, whom all the world knows to have been a flute-player in real life, had to perform a solo (behind the scenes) in the Berlin opera, and it was perhaps out of compliment to the instrument of his choice that Meyerbeer wrote the trio just named, oblivious of Cherubini's reply to the question, "What is worse than one flute?" It should be mentioned here that "Ein Feldlager in Schlesien" was produced, with alterations and additions, at Vienna, in 1847,

Jenny Lind again acting the part of *Vielka*. This version took its name from the heroine, and, strange to say, obtained more success among the whilom enemies of Frederic than the original form of the opera enjoyed amongst his friends.

Meyerbeer's next important work of a dramatic character was the overture and incidental music to his brother Michel's five-act play, "*Struensee*." Michel had written this piece as far back as 1826, but it had never been performed, for reasons to be found in the nature of the subject. *Struensee*, as historical students know, was an ambitious and unfortunate minister of the King of Denmark, who suffered death in 1772 for his share in a palace conspiracy, the circumstances of which the royal family of Denmark did not wish to have brought under public notice. Frederic VI., the reigning monarch at Copenhagen in 1826, used all his influence, therefore, to keep the play unacted, and succeeded so well that Michel Beer died in 1831 without witnessing it on the stage. In 1846 the same powerful objection did not arise, and "*Struensee*" was performed in the Royal Theatre of Berlin, by command of the King of Prussia, with the addition of the music specially written for it by the author's brother. This music consisted of an overture—which every amateur knows as a grand example of the master—nine pieces to accompany the drama, and four *entr'actes*. The last are never heard in public, for reasons assuredly not found in themselves, since they are of high interest and fully developed.

To the year 1846 belongs also a "*Fackeltanz*" (Torch Dance), written for the marriage of the King of Bavaria with Princess Wilhelmine of Prussia. We hardly need say that this piece is really a *Marche aux flambeaux* rather than a dance; or that Meyerbeer subsequently composed two other works of the same character—the second for the marriage of Princess Charlotte of Prussia in 1853; the third for that of Princess Anne.

In 1847, after directing the performance of his revised "*Feldlager in Schlesien*" at Vienna, with Jenny Lind as the heroine, Meyerbeer visited this country. So, at any rate, we are told by the writer of the article "*Meyerbeer*" in Grove's "*Dictionary of Music*." No confirmation of the statement can be found in the journals of the time. Had Meyerbeer come to England at all, he would have done so, no doubt, for the production of "*Robert le Diable*," and the

début of Jenny Lind, at Her Majesty's Theatre (May 4), but he certainly was not present on that occasion, preferring to remain in Berlin. It is true, however, that his coming was announced—in Mr. Lumley's prospectus of the season, which proved to be no more trustworthy than other documents of the same character. Mr. Chorley says :*—

It was announced that M. Meyerbeer was to bring his “Camp de Silesie” to London—that opera which he has never allowed to travel beyond the barriers of Berlin—aware, it may be fancied, of its weakness. It was undertaken that Mendelssohn should, in the same season, produce his opera of “The Tempest.” There was, thirdly, to be a new opera by Signor Verdi. Of these three promises the last alone was performed. It may be doubted whether anything beyond the merest preliminary negotiations had been entered into with the two great German masters.

Meyerbeer continued to discharge his duties in Berlin during the rest of the year 1847.

The master, who had done Wagner some service in Paris, was of use to him in Berlin also; for there he produced “Rienzi” (1847), “after long and careful preparation,” and used all his influence in favour of “Der Fliegende Holländer.” We have seen how he was requited by a man who, with all his great qualities, had some which were very small indeed. A natural curiosity here prompts the question, “How did Meyerbeer feel towards Wagner in face of such ingratitude?” The materials for framing an answer are scanty. Meyerbeer was an extremely cautious man where he discerned a possibility of making enemies, and, though he might feel deeply, he took good care to hide his sentiments behind a smile. M. Blaze de Bury, who enjoyed the master's intimacy, declares that he could never hear the name of Wagner without a disagreeable sensation, “which he took no pains to conceal.” Elsewhere we are told, on the same authority, that Wagner's name “had the effect of a dissonance,” and that Meyerbeer cherished too much respect for the authority of the masters “not to detest those blustering theories invented to serve instead of learning; those absurdities deliberately put forward to attract the notice of the public, like the helmet on the head of a vendor of pencils.” M. de Bury adds the terms of a conversation with Meyerbeer on this subject, but, unfortunately, he

* *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections.* Vol. I., p. 294.

himself did nearly all the talking, Meyerbeer saying as little as possible and making that little indefinite. On the whole, there is no reason to believe that he personally resented Wagner's outrageous onslaught upon his artistic character. He possessed an invincible good nature, and hated quarrelling for its own sake as well as because it signifies bad policy; while, himself satiated with public applause, he could afford to let personal attacks pass him by like the idle wind.

We now approach the time when Meyerbeer, with "*L'Africaine*" partially completed, suspended labour on that work and brought out "*Le Prophète*."

Although "*L'Africaine*" was not produced till after the master's death, its composition began as far back as 1845—that is to say, it followed hard upon the production of "*Les Huguenots*." The idea was to write a great part for Madame Rosine Stoltz, then in the prime of her powers. Meyerbeer, as we have seen, always had a sharp eye for the advantages which come to a composer through eminent interpreters, and he greatly desired to utilise, for that end, the personal and artistic qualities of Stoltz. M. Blaze de Bury says:—

An incorrect, unequal, but essentially gifted singer, with a voice of gold, and a nature of fire, Rosine Stoltz could hardly fail, by her merits and even her defects, to attract the curiosity of the master, if only for a time. One can imagine her the ideal of such a heroine (as the *Africaine*), and, while calculating the profit to his music from such a fine dramatic organisation, Meyerbeer, who never lost sight of the picturesque, naturally regarded the physical attraction of the woman, and the very special effect which a slender and beautiful person, her skin tinted to copper-colour, could not fail to produce upon the operatic public.

The master, it is said, had actually finished his score, and was about to put it in hand for representation, when he determined upon altering certain parts of the libretto. This caused delay, and finally shelved the work for many a long year. Scribe refused to make the changes required; Meyerbeer insisted; Scribe waxed obstinate, and, though he at length became more tractable, the composer then found that his music had grown old-fashioned. Forthwith "*L'Africaine*" entered upon the era of patching and mending, which endured till shortly before Meyerbeer's death, and resulted in the rejection of sufficient music to make another opera. The

master was naturally glad to put this troublous "*L'Africaine*" aside when Scribe sent him the book of "*Le Prophète*."

The production of "*Le Prophète*" took place, as usual with Meyerbeer's works, only after many delays. Féétis tells us that the opera was several times announced under different names, and the fact is characteristic of Meyerbeer's fastidiousness—a quality which, as it seems to us, sprang from excessive timidity. The master had a perfect horror of adverse criticism, and trembled before the most insignificant scribbler in a public print. Hence the extreme precautions under which his works were brought out. The whole situation had to be surveyed with "anxious polyclivity" lest an open joint somewhere should let in the arrow of censure. It is only right to add that the final cause of delay as regards "*Le Prophète*" was independent of Meyerbeer, and had more to do with the Paris mob, who, in February, 1848, transformed King Louis Philippe into plain Mr. John Smith and sent him post haste to England. This amounted to an artistic as well as political upset. It disorganised the Opéra especially, and only after a year had passed did the director and composer think it wise or find it convenient to produce the new work at the Théâtre de la Nation, as the erstwhile Académie Royale was then called.

It is interesting, at this distance of time, to read the criticisms which the French and other journals poured forth anent "*Le Prophète*," and to gather from them, not so much definite impressions concerning the work, as an idea of the light in which Meyerbeer was generally regarded. We are able to see, through a perfect blaze of eulogy, that the composer's method was accepted with a certain amount of reservation, sometimes of openly qualifying remark. The impression made by Meyerbeer's elaborate musical structures and grandiose effects seems to have been much like that of the charge of the Light Brigade upon the French general who exclaimed, looking at the wild ride, "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre.*" Thus, a writer in a journal devoted to Meyerbeer, said:—

Greatly as the productions of this composer must be admired, his followers not possessing his genius will, it is to be feared, rather injure than forward the advancement of pure musical taste. The peculiarities of his style, indeed, are such as will readily be resorted to for reasons far different from those by which he was actuated; for, in finding the possibility of substituting

noise for melody, and startling contrast and effect for merely scientific combinations, many a composer who would otherwise have lived unerring may be induced to offer his meagre and trashy productions to the world.

The veiled indictment to be detected in the foregoing words may be seen also in the recondite observations of Fétis, who describes "*Le Prophète*" as the fruit of an alliance between imagination and reason, not imagination and sensibility, from which union sprang the great duet in "*Les Huguenots*." M. Scudo witnesses to a similar purport in a passage which the reader will thank us for translating :—

Of a penetrating spirit, full of sagacity and depth, M. Meyerbeer shares neither the advantages nor the infirmities of those spontaneous natures which shine like the light, lavishing, without restriction or thought of the morrow, the perfume of their youth and inheritance. A philosopher and thinker, he elaborates ideas slowly, and under the eye of reason, and when he opens to himself the doors of life he is almost sure of making glorious progress. M. Meyerbeer leaves nothing to chance ; he foresees all that it is possible to foresee ; he learnedly combines all his effects, determining the faintest shades. His scores are full of explanatory remarks and ingenious observations, which show the pre-occupation of his spirit and his profound knowledge of dramatic strategy. . . . One might, doubtless, desire a little more variety and spontaneousness in the music of "*Le Prophète*"; the changelessly sombre character of the subject sometimes wearying the attention. We find there piquant and ingenious combinations, and mixtures of tone-colours the effect of which appears to us more curious than dramatic. It is a dangerous slope which leads to research for strange harmonies and multiplied modulations ; and, when one does not possess the science and profundity of M. Meyerbeer, the method of instrumentation which his example authorises produces the music of M. Verdi, and worse still.

The evidence we have quoted above is that of Meyerbeer's enthusiastic friends. They could neither help seeing, nor refrain from stating, that the master was a kind of musical strategist and tactician, who, like Carnot or Von Moltke, "organised victory" with infinite care and forethought, and by means of the most daring and dazzling combinations. "*Le Prophète*," more, perhaps, than "*Robert*" or "*Les Huguenots*," illustrated this view of Meyerbeer's musical character. Hence the expression of a feeling in critical

circles that admiration was not untempered by reservation of entire approval.

M. Scudo tells us that the first performance of "Le Prophète" left a good deal to desire, although Viardot, Castellan, Roger, Levasseur, and Gueymard took part in it. Madame Viardot, however, seems to have satisfied the composer by her *Fides*, which drew from Meyerbeer the subjoined eloquent letter:—

My dear Pauline,—Forgive me if I do not come to-day to express my admiration and gratitude. But I am indisposed, and feel the want of a few hours' rest; besides, what could I say in comparison to that which the tears and the enthusiasm of two thousand persons yesterday proclaimed of your admirable creation. I ceased for an instant to remember that I was the author of the work; you had transformed me into a breathless and excited auditor of your impassioned and truthful accents. Adieu.

MEYERBEER.

With the public the success of "Le Prophète" was complete. According to the *Débats*, the average nightly receipts for the first twenty-five performances were 10,000 francs. Yet even so great good fortune could not keep the Opéra open, although its subsidy, under a decree of the National Assembly, was 170,000 francs. The establishment lay under a load of debt, which crushed the life out of it, and on the 15th of July, three months after the production of Meyerbeer's work, its doors were closed. The house opened again in the autumn, but may be said only to have lingered on till June, 1853, when the Emperor Napoleon decreed: "From July 1 next, the Opéra will be under the Imperial Civil List, and placed to that end within the functions of the Minister of our House." Then the great establishment had peace.

Before passing altogether from "Le Prophète," let us quote an anecdote told of Meyerbeer in M. Charles de Boigne's "Petits Mémoires de l'Opéra." The composer being slow to write the ballet music, one of the two directors then reigning hit upon a shrewd method of spurring him on:—

- D. Master, have you written the music for the divertissement?
- M. Not yet.
- D. So much the better.
- M. Why so much the better?
- D. Because I want you to let me get it from a certain composer.
- M. Sir! Sir!!

D. Don't be angry, master. You know I have faith in your genius. At the Opéra I know only "Robert" and "Les Huguenots"; success is yours alone; "La Juive" is an accident, but—but—

M. I can't write ballet music! be frank.

D. You have never taken the trouble.

M. And the act of the Nuns?

D. Admirable; but the dance airs in "Les Huguenots?"

M. I don't like them any more than you do; as for the divertissement of "Le Prophète," I will try to satisfy you; let me see what I can do; if I succeed, you shall ask me for the music of your first ballet.

The composer straightway went home to work, and the director's end was gained.

Meyerbeer returned to his post in Berlin after the production of this third French opera, and resumed what may be called his official labours. Amongst other things he wrote the "Bayerischer Schüfgen Marsch," a cantata for four male voices and chorus, accompanied by brass instruments, words by King Louis of Bavaria. An ode to the sculptor, Rauch, suggested by the unveiling of Frederick the Great's monument, also belongs to this period. It is a work of considerable dimensions, for solo, chorus, and orchestra, and was first performed at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, June 4, 1851. In this year, moreover, Meyerbeer produced a Festival Hymn, *alla capella*, for four voices and chorus, in celebration of the King of Prussia's silver wedding. Meanwhile, he was pestered by attacks of a peculiarly irritating nature. An organ of "sweetness and light," combined with Christian zeal, the *Preussische Zeitung*, issued a series of articles in which the master was accused of bringing Christianity into contempt by acts of malice aforeshadowed. A correspondent of the *Musical World*, writing from Berlin at the time, described the nature of this onslaught as follows:—

The basis of the argument is that Meyerbeer is a Jew, and, in his operas, has frequently employed church music as a means of effect, such as the organ passage in "Robert" and the Lutheran hymn of Marcel in the "Huguenots." But all his previous offences sink into insignificance compared with the still more extensive employment of similar means in "Le Prophète." There a solemn rite of the church, a coronation, is desecrated by the consecration of an imposter with all the pomp of priestly

processions, incense, and anthems. In this spirit the whole of the composer's last opera is criticised ; no merit as a work of art redeems it ; it is an insidious design against the Christian faith for the purpose, it must be inferred, of propagating Judaism. The public must, therefore, beware how they listen to music ; the most inspiring and glorious strains of harmony are snares for the soul if the composer is a Jew. This is a new principle in criticism and deserves to be noticed, because finding readers and approvers among a people who represent themselves as the sole possessors of the gift of clear and philosophical appreciation of art in all its manifestations and a universality of knowledge that makes prejudice in them impossible.

It does not appear that Meyerbeer took any public notice of these scandalous attacks ; but one is tempted to ask now whether Richard Wagner, who borrowed so much, read these articles and then conceived the idea which came forth in the savage form of "*Judaism in Music*."

In 1851 Meyerbeer's health began to give way under the strain which his extremely anxious, not to say "worrying," nature imposed upon it. A constitution of iron was required to carry him safely through the crisis of producing a grand opera. The mere labour of composition, according to his method of writing and re-writing, then rejecting and writing again, must have been sufficiently severe ; but this was ease compared to the agony which set in with rehearsal. Fétis says :—

The rehearsals, which he superintended with a care unknown to other composers, and the new pieces which he wrote rapidly while the work was under study, caused him great fatigue. To see his exquisite politeness towards the artists on the stage and in the orchestra one could not imagine the pain and impatience in his soul when faults of execution missed the effect he intended and had resolved at any price to obtain. This acted in a painful manner upon his nervous system.

Not less hard to bear were the assaults of criticism, to which, as we have before pointed out, the master was peculiarly susceptible. Meyerbeer never had sufficient confidence in himself to disregard the opinions of others, and he suffered torments in questioning whether he might not have done better and avoided the censure that gave him pain. Experiences of this kind eventually tell upon a sensitive organisation, and at the date above-named the master ceased work and went to Spa, which became afterwards his favourite

resort. There he would avoid all company, taking long and solitary walks, or riding on an ass, or shutting himself up in his apartments, and following implicitly the advice of his physicians. Spa has been described as a—

Pretty miniature of a watering-place, embosomed among gentle heights whose tops are capped with the sun as a shining head-dress, whose sides are robed with wealthy trees, and at whose feet are tiny rivulets sparkling and singing as they flow, and bearing tribute from the treasury of springs and fountains in the hills that are their birth-place to feed the larger streams in which they live but to be lost.

In 1851 the demon of gambling disfigured this Eden, but Meyerbeer, though in Spa, was not of it from a society point of view. He went there to gain health, and found, we may well believe, many a happy inspiration during his lonely rambles about the pretty hills and valleys. It is needless to say that the eyes of the world followed him whithersoever he went, eagerly watching for some sign of the production of "L'Africaine," an opera long since completed. But no sign was forthcoming. The master had set his heart upon Sophie Cruvelli as *Selika*, and the Director of the Opéra, it is said, would then have nothing to do with that somewhat erratic artist. Other obstacles stood in the way, and so the desk containing "L'Africaine" was steadfastly kept locked. All this time the world did not dream that the Meyerbeer of the grand stage and mighty *ensembles* was preparing to invade the smaller domain of Auber and Adolphe Adam. This, however, turned out to be the case, and in due time "L'Etoile du Nord" was announced at the Opéra Comique.

Meyerbeer, in this case, "fluttered the Volscians" to some tune, and there was dire commotion among French musicians, who naturally looked upon the Opéra Comique as their own peculiar inheritance. They had grown accustomed to the cosmopolitanism of the Grand Opéra, where the genius that is above geography, physical or political, was always welcome. But the Opéra Comique—the home of Grétry and Méhul, of Boieldieu and Hérold—what did the Berlin Capellmeister in such a place! Extraordinary heart-burnings followed, and it was suddenly discovered that Meyerbeer stood in the way of native talent. He was accused of intrigue all round. If an opera was rejected, Meyerbeer influenced the director; if it was delayed, Meyerbeer had a hand in it; if it failed, Meyerbeer had

conspired to bring about the result. But the poor Frenchmen had one source of consolation. They knew perfectly well that Meyerbeer would fail on the limited stage in the Rue Favart. They said:—

To obtain success there it is necessary to have qualities more refined, elegant, and *spirituelle* than passionate—qualities which do not appear to belong to Meyerbeer's talent, the proper domain of which is dramatic expression.

With such words as these the French composers comforted one another, and awaited the realisation of their hopes. But they waited in vain. “L'Etoile du Nord”—into which was incorporated some half-dozen numbers from the Berlin opera “Ein Feldlager”—saw the light on February 16, 1854, and found instant acceptance at the hands of a public who really did not much care about the traditions so prized by critics and connoisseurs. In this case the public broke right away from the guidance of the press. “‘L'Etoile du Nord’ is not an opera at all,” said some critics; while others apostrophised the composer thus:—

Yes, dear and glorious master, one must admire you, but ought not to imitate you. You are a great dramatic composer, a powerful individuality, but the way to which you have committed yourself is not a road that leads to Paradise. Do you know who will be your artistic children, if you leave any? The Richard Wagners and their emulators . . . Let us re-assure ourselves about the future. Monsigny, Grétry, Dalayrac, Méhul, Boieldieu, Hérold, Auber—O you charming masters, facile and moving musicians, who have made France illustrious, do not fear the great magician who has just suddenly invaded your modest domain. He will not make us forget you. This powerful constructor of *ensembles*, who piles Pelion upon Ossa in order to scale heaven, resembles you more than you believe in that of his work which will live . . . As for “L'Etoile du Nord,” posterity will not place it in the same rank with your beautiful masterpieces, because, in the hierarchy of the creations of the human spirit, the Last Judgment is below the Transfiguration.

Jules Janin, not being a musical critic, took a different view of Meyerbeer's comic opera. Having witnessed the first performance, he rushed home and wrote:—

We have come from the Opéra Comique, where M. Meyerbeer has just brought out his new *chef d'œuvre* “L'Etoile du Nord” (drama by M. Scribe), and without fear of being contradicted by

the learned and competent critic who will render an account of it in these columns, we venture to assert that the illustrious master has deserved and obtained universal praise. In the new style of music which M. Meyerbeer has created by his genius and subdued by his talent, "L'Etoile du Nord" is a puissant work, superior and charming in every respect. Never, perhaps, in so short a space (a comic opera in three acts) has M. Meyerbeer scattered airs, duets, and *morceaux d'ensemble* with so prodigal a hand.

M. Janin wrote this with impunity, and might have written a great deal more in the same strain without abating the soreness of his musical compatriots, who would not allow that any good could come to the Salle Favart from the universal Nazareth outside France.

"L'Etoile du Nord" soon travelled to Germany, being produced in Dresden in 1855, where it had an immense success, and brought to the composer the ribbon of the Royal Albert Order. It was also played at Liége about the same time. In 1855, also, "L'Etoile du Nord" appeared in an Italian dress at the Covent Garden Theatre, the prospectus of the season having stated that—

M. Meyerbeer has composed, expressly for the Royal Italian Opera, on poetry written expressly by M. Scribe, entirely new recitatives, and has added three pieces to the original score.

Meyerbeer undertook to supervise the London performance of his work, and reached town on purpose at the end of June, after an absence of twenty-three years. He came to be "lionised" in true English fashion, as to which let us quote from a contemporary journal (*Musical World*, July 7) :—

Judging from the manner in which he is *fêted* and received in all quarters, the composer of "The Huguenots" will not find cause to regret his visit to the metropolis of Great Britain. In all places, high and low, where music is loved, Meyerbeer is honoured. From the palaces of princes, ministers, and ambassadors to the concert-rooms of Exeter and St. Martin's Halls there is a general demand for his society. He must eat every one's dinner and attend every one's concert; so that, what with his daily occupations at the theatre during rehearsals and his numerous engagements, morning and evening, Meyerbeer must have his hands full and very few minutes to spare. Nevertheless, at 7 a.m., day after day, those who get up soon enough, and have the wish, may see the celebrated musician taking his "constitutional" walk in Hyde Park some hours before break-

fast. It is at this early period of the day that he composes, like Auber on horseback in the Champs Elysées, and Spohr in his garden at Hesse-Cassel.

Among the dinners Meyerbeer had to eat was a Royal one at Buckingham Palace, and among the concerts he had to attend was one given under the auspices of the Musical Union, at which what Mr. Ella rather infelicitously described as his "imposing presence" unsettled the performers. But no honours turned the master from his work, and in due course the Italian "Stella del Nord" was produced, with Bosio, Rudersdorff, Gardoni, Lablache, Tagliafico, and Formes in the cast. It achieved an immense success, and then Meyerbeer, perfectly content, rushed away to Spa for the purpose of recruiting his exhausted energies.

Delighted with his success in comic opera, Meyerbeer resolved to follow it up. Hence the production, in 1859, of "Le Pardon de Ploermël," known in England as "Dinorah." Meanwhile, however, other subjects had a share in his thoughts, particularly one about which such biographies of the master as are available to English readers say but little.

It has often been remarked that Meyerbeer had no very exalted notions of an operatic subject; preferring bustling, blatant, and sometimes vulgar historic scenes, more or less travestied by Scribe, to those of a refined and classic nature. In this respect some injustice has been done to the composer. As a matter of fact, he was always prospecting for a truly noble subject. "Hero and Leander" at one time attracted him; so did the "Orestes" of Æschylus; while of "Faust" he thought seriously, having been designated by Goethe as the musician of that great drama. But all this coquetting came to nothing. The case was somewhat different with another work, the history of which has been told by M. Blaze de Bury at great length. M. de Bury had written a drama for the Odéon, entitled "La Jeunesse de Goethe"—a fantastic affair, apparently, in which the poet was represented as "vivant ses œuvres," however that may be. While engaged in distributing the parts and so forth, the manager, Rounat, called M. de Bury's attention to a night scene in the third act, where he thought a *mélodrame*, or orchestral symphony, would be effective. The following conversation ensued:—

R. We must have music, that is understood; but who will

write it. We cannot think for a moment in such a situation of employing an ordinary *chef d'orchestre*.

De B. We have Meyerbeer.

R. What, Meyerbeer! You think that Meyerbeer would consent to write for us.

De B. I know it. He has already composed music to *Mignon's* song in the second act.

R. (delighted). You are in the way of obtaining from Meyerbeer these two pieces?

De B. I answer for it.

R. Well, then, I cannot imagine why, being sure of that, you do not ask more.

De B. Do you mean that I ought to make an opera of my piece and sing cavatinas to Goethe.

R. There is no question of cavatinas; the piece suits me; and I believe in its success, the best proof of which is that I play it. Only, in your place, instead of demanding from Meyerbeer a mark of complaisance, I would try to interest him musically in the work, and by some means give his genius a large part therein.

This conversation impressed the dramatist, who went home and spent the night in writing the text of an intermezzo to be performed between the fourth and fifth acts. The next morning he called on Meyerbeer, who, after some conversation regarding the words of an Ode to Schiller (performed at the centenary festival of that poet), remarked:—

M. You know that *Mignon's* song is composed, and now I am at your service for some bars of *mélodrame*.

De B. Something better is possible than *Mignon's* song and your bars.

M. What! will not M. de la Rounat have my music?

De B. It isn't that. He takes it, but—

M. To correct it, perhaps?

De B. Not at all. He does you the honour to accept your music, only he claims more.

M. I understand. He wants too much.

De B. You are right.

M. Come, explain yourself seriously. What is required of me?

De B. (Taking out manuscript). This, dear master, since you desire to know.

M. (Having read the manuscript). But this means a score, my dear friend.

De B. I know it. Do you object to make the effort?

M. Not the least; but I must think it over, look up my

Goethe, and then read your piece again. We will speak about the matter in a few days.

Eventually Meyerbeer undertook the work, but on his own plan and conditions, expressed in remarkable words. The master said :—

I have thought much about your piece, about the part that music ought to take in it, and the manner in which, to succeed, it should intervene. Perhaps we are on the track of a discovery. *The old forms are used up; operas in five acts are no longer possible.* Let us seek in the conditions of modern art the alliance of music and drama which the ancients appear to have established. That tempts me, I vow; I even say that I have long dreamed of it, and reckon to prove it, if we have a success, by making further proposals to you. Meanwhile, I shall intervene in your work without mixing myself up with it.

Meyerbeer went on to explain that not even a violin should be heard till the time for the intermezzo arrived. Then he would "let loose all his forces," beginning with a grand overture. De Bury was charmed with Meyerbeer's idea, but nothing came of it till four years later (September, 1861), when the dramatist and composer met at Ems. M. de Bury writes :—

One morning, as we were breakfasting in his room, he cried, "Ah! that 'Jeunesse de Goethe,' now is the time to speak of it. Would you like to see the score?" He opened his desk and took out a voluminous packet, which he put upon the piano. I turned over the leaves hungrily. It was complete! the "Erl-king," the Hymn of the Fates in "Iphigenia," the scene of *Margaret* in the church, the immense seraphic Hosanna of the second *Faust*. I saw it; I touched it. Meyerbeer, all the while, looked at me, happy in my joy, and satisfied with himself. "Another time," he said, "you shall hear it, for to-day it is enough that you have seen. You can now say to our good friends that Meyerbeer keeps his word." Then, taking the volume, seven times sealed, he placed it in the desk and locked it up.

According to the evidence of M. Blaze de Bury, there was undoubtedly an intention on the part of Meyerbeer to produce his "Jeunesse de Goethe" at the Odéon, but, unfortunately, the time which suited the composer did not fit in with the manager's arrangements. The matter is referred to at some length in a letter written by Meyerbeer to his literary colleague on January 28, 1861 :—

You tell me that as regards the month of April, when it would be convenient to me to give my work, M. de la Rounat has an

engagement with Madame Ristori, and that, consequently, he proposes to bring out the piece in the Spring of 1862. At that time I shall certainly be free, musically speaking, and I see no difficulty so far; nevertheless, my dear friend, to take a definite engagement for a time so distant, and that will not be reached for fourteen months, is what, in my position, I cannot see my way to do. A head of a family, living out of France, and under the circumstances of these times—who knows, as regards a future so distant, what may happen to keep me at home? If we wait till October 1 next to sign an engagement for April, 1862, the date which M. de la Rounat proposes, he will be sure to have the work seven months in advance, while, on our side, the future will not be hampered to such a length of time. Now, let us talk a little about our piece. The scene for which I had most fear (that of the cathedral in "Faust") is that which comes out best of all, and I hope you will not be dissatisfied with it. As regards the rest, I shall not ask you to make any further change. Musically speaking, only one number disquiets me, and about it I hesitate, and scarcely know what to do, I mean the "Erl-King." Schubert's music to that ballad has become so popular throughout the entire world that it seems to me impossible to make the public accept any other to the same words, while, for myself, I am so much under its influence that I do not see my way to compose anything which would give me satisfaction. I have an idea, therefore, to preserve Schubert's melodies, putting them underneath the choruses for the "Erl-King's daughters," and at the same time, as I need not say, scoring for orchestra what Schubert has written for the pianoforte only. However, there are two courses before me. One is to make the father and son speak in *mélodrame*, accompanied by Schubert's melodies in the orchestra, and allow only the *Erl-King* and his daughters to sing. The other is to make the parts of father and son singing parts. Be good enough to let me know which of these two plans you prefer. From a purely musical point of view it is advisable that all three should sing; but I will act according to your decision. Send me also, and at once, the "Chorus of Students," for I should better like to write it just now, when the impression of the rest of the music is warm in my imagination, than later, when other work has driven the matter from my mind.

Unhappily, "La Jeunesse de Goethe" was never produced, and M. Blaze de Bury tells us why. He says:—

Kept at Berlin as much by his court duties as by the state of his health, Meyerbeer seemed to the public as though he had forgotten the road to Paris. Nevertheless, the desire to possess the masterpiece increased in proportion to the obstacles. . . Each

year a place was kept for it—the best that could be secured in the arrangements of the repertory. At length, in the autumn of 1863, Meyerbeer arrived in Paris, settled down there, and deliberations were immediately resumed. This time the affair was complicated by the question of the "Africaine," which, just then on the cards, had possession of the public mind. Hence the production of the work "La Jeunesse de Goethe" that winter could not be thought of, and another year's delay took place. . . . Meyerbeer's score exists complete, finished, authentic, and others beside myself have had it in their hands.

A natural question is: What has become of "La Jeunesse de Goethe?" We can find no trace of it in musical record since the composer's death, and are bound to infer that it still remains in manuscript, kept thus from a world which would be very glad to receive it.

During his stay in Paris Meyerbeer was constantly engaged, above all, with the "Africaine," which he had at last firmly resolved to bring out. He showed his usual excessive care for details in making the preparations, but these by no means monopolised his thoughts. He had time to spare for "La Jeunesse de Goethe," with the *mise-en-scène* of which he concerned himself greatly, while his mind ran much upon the composition of another *opéra comique*, and to this end he looked through scores of romances, hoping for a suitable story. M. Blaze de Bury tells us that at this period he was composing everywhere—in the streets, when driving and when taking a walk outside the walls. Often he would stop, take out his pocket-book, and fix an idea that had occurred to his brooding mind. On such occasions thoughtless acquaintances would sometimes intrude their conversation upon him, to his great discomfiture and annoyance. "Is that you, dear master? How glad I am to see you. What about the 'Africaine'? What are you doing at this moment?" So pestered, the poor man often forgot his usual courtesy, and would sharply answer: "What am I doing at this moment! Can't you see? I am walking down the Champs Elysées." The same authority sketches for us the routine of Meyerbeer's daily life:—

Like Lamartine, he began work every day at six o'clock; towards noon, after breakfast, he dressed, received or paid visits, always according to his programme of the week, for, in that regularly laborious existence, nothing was left to chance. About two o'clock he took a walk, returned at three, and resumed his

work, continuing at it till nearly midnight, scarcely giving himself the time necessary for dinner.

Meyerbeer continued this life of hard work to the end, for even till within a few weeks of his death his mind plunged into the future, big with projects of further achievement and more glory. He often talked of the great masters with half-sad reflections upon his own shortcomings. Mozart appears to have been his idol, and Blaze de Bury tells *à propos* a characteristic anecdote. Coming away from the *Italiens* after a performance of "Don Giovanni," which the public had coldly received, De Bury asked Meyerbeer whether, in his opinion, the execution of the work was the cause of its non-success, adding that, for himself, he thought the *chef d'œuvre* did not satisfy the wants of the time. "Ah!" exclaimed the master, "and why does 'Don Giovanni' no longer satisfy?" "I don't know," replied his friend; "perhaps because I heard yesterday the fourth act of the 'Huguenots.'" "In that case," observed Meyerbeer, "allow me to say: So much the worse for the fourth act of the 'Huguenots.'" This story, as it seems to us, is capable of very wide application at the time now present.

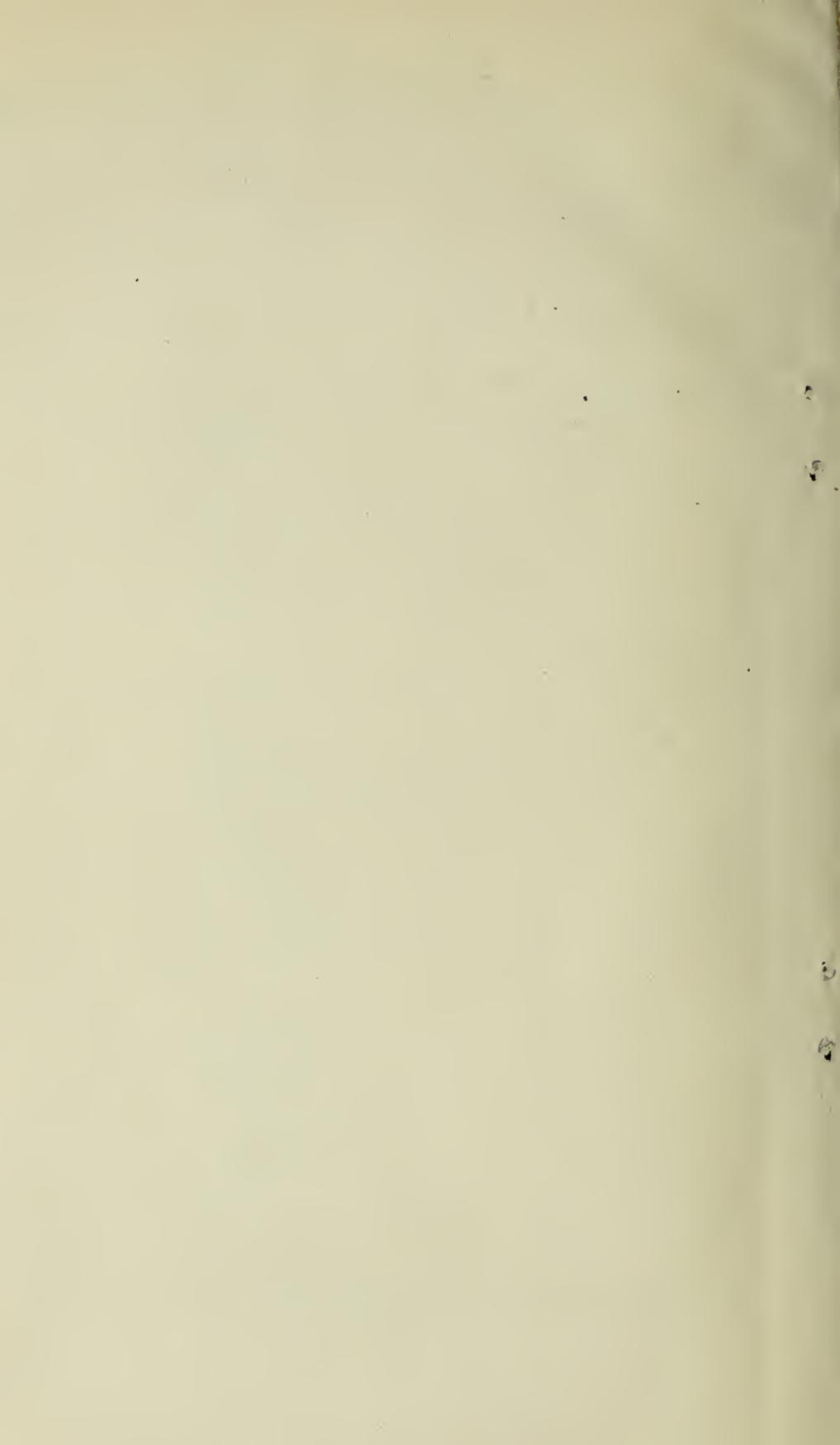
Dreams of future achievement by a man seventy-two years old are of doubtful realisation, and Meyerbeer's visions were soon ended by death. All through the winter of 1863-4 he busied himself with preparing the "Africaine" for a performance he was never to see. In October, 1863, that opera was supposed to be finished, but the exacting, never satisfied composer went on cutting and polishing, taking out a bit here, putting in a bit there, altering this page, re-writing that, and so on. Indeed, so much matter was finally rejected that it fills a volume containing twenty-two complete numbers, or fragments of numbers. Doubtless the anxiety and worry connected with the "Africaine" broke down the composer's always feeble health. The end came almost suddenly. Seized with mortal illness on April 23, 1864, Meyerbeer passed, on May 22, from the scene of his busy labours and great success. A year later (April 28, 1865) his cherished opera, which lay on his heart in the very article of death, had a triumphant reception on the illustrious stage to which he contributed his finest works. The coffin of the master was laden with tokens of honour. He was a Member of the Institute of France, of the Royal Academy of Belgium, of the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts, and of several other

kindred institutions. Among his decorations were the Prussian Order of Merit, the Legion of Honour, the Leopold Order of Belgium, the Crown of Oak of Holland, the Sun of Brazil, and the Polar Star of Sweden: But better than all these was the universal sorrow that paid a noble tribute to departed genius.

INDEX.

	PAGE
“AFRICAIN, L’” ..	29, 35, 42, 43
“ALIMELEK” ..	9
“ALMANSAR” ..	13
ANECDOTES OF MEYERBEER ..	4, 32, 39, 43
BAVARIAN MARCH ..	33
BEER, HERR ..	I
,, AMALIE ..	I
,, MICHEL ..	27
“BRANDENBURG GATE, THE” ..	13
BURY, M. DE ..	38
“CROCIATO, IL” ..	13—16
CRUVELLI, SOPHIE ..	35
“DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHA, THE” ..	9
DELAVIGNE ..	17
DESCHAMPS ..	20
“EMMA DI RESBURGO” ..	12, 14
“ESULE DI GRANATA, L’” ..	13
“ETOILE DU NORD, L’” ..	35—38
“FACKELTANZ” ..	27
“FELDLAGER IN SCHLESIEN, EIN” ..	26
FESTIVAL HYMN ..	33
FREDERIC WILLIAM IV. ..	25
GÄNSBACHER ..	8
“GOD AND NATURE” ..	8
HABENECK ..	21
HARLAS, MDLLE. ..	9
“HUGUENOTS, LES” ..	20—25
HUMMEL ..	9
“JEUNESSE DE GOETHE, LA” ..	38—42

													PAGE.
SALIERI	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	10
SCRIBE	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	17, 20, 29	
“ SEMIRAMIDE ”	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	12
STOLTZ, MADAME	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	29
STRUENSEE	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	27
VÉRON, DR.	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	19
VOGLER, ABBÉ	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3-5
WAGNER AND MEYERBEER	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	22-24, 28	
WEBER, BERNARD	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3
„ CARL MARIA VON	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	5, 8, 10, 13
ZELTER	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	3



LIFE OF MOZART

BY

OTTO JAHN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

BY

PAULINE D. TOWNSEND

Three Volumes, Cloth,

WITH FIVE PORTRAITS, AND PREFACE BY GEORGE GROVE, D.C.L.

PRICE £1 11S. 6D.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

THE TIMES.

"Mr. Grove, in his brief and able preface, calls the publication in an English dress of Otto Jahn's famous biography of Mozart 'an event in our musical history' and his statement cannot be considered an exaggeration. . . . The English public is to be congratulated upon a translation of his monumental effort which, without exaggeration be called excellent. Miss Townsend has done her work with skill and conscientiousness, and we doubt whether a much more careful compilation with the original than we have thought it necessary to undertake would dispel many, or any, serious blunders."

DAILY NEWS.

"He (Jahn) has made admirable use of Nissen, with his laborious compilation of all other authorities, and he has succeeded in producing a work which is complete without being confusing through excess of detail, and in which the interest of the narrative is not broken by undue reference to other writers. . . . Those, treating of the same points, have treated them differently and often incorrectly. The work has been well translated, and it is prefaced by a brief but interesting introduction from the pen of Mr. George Grove."

THE ATHENÆUM.

"It is with great pleasure that we are able to speak in terms of the highest praise of the manner in which Miss Townsend has acquitted herself of the not an easy task of translation. In so voluminous a work as the present, it is almost inevitable that a few slips should be found; but those that we have noticed are not only extremely rare, but mostly of slight importance. . . . We have done an inadequate justice in this review to one of the most important works in the whole domain of musical literature; our excuse must be the absolute impossibility of dealing fully with it within reasonable bounds. We conclude by most cordially recommending it to all who are interested in music, and need only add that the printing and general appearance of the volumes are worthy alike of their contents and of the reputation of the firm which publishes them."

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

HIS WORK AND INFLUENCE
ON THE MUSIC OF GERMANY, 1685-1750

BY

PHILIPP SPITTA

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

CLARA BELL AND J. A. FULLER-MAITLAND

THREE VOLUMES. PRICE £2 2S.

LONDON & NEW YORK: NOVELLO, EWER & CO.



3 0112 062283202

NOVELLO'S PRIMERS OF MUSICAL BIOGRAPHY
BY
JOSEPH BENNETT.

Price One Shilling ; Cloth Gilt, Two Shillings each.

NOW READY.

HECTOR BERLIOZ
FREDERIC CHOPIN
ROSSINI
HERUBINI MEYERBEER

PROSPECTUS.

years have passed since Mr. Joseph Bennett began, in the *Musical* a series of biographical notices which are still far from ended. original purpose was a limited one—namely, to throw light upon the personality of famous musicians by means of extracts selected and arranged from their letters and other writings. Hence the series had the title “The Great Composers, sketched by themselves.”

Subsequent upon the remarkable favour with which the notices were received, it was determined to extend their scope, and while making prominent the Masters' own testimony, to deal with each subject in a complete biographical form, as far as allowed by the limits necessarily imposed. The words “sketched by themselves” were therefore dropped from the title.

It was further resolved to make additions in the case of the composers dealt with under the original idea, and to issue the notices separately as “Primers of Musical Biography.”

The intention of “Novello's Primers of Musical Biography” is to convey, as clearly as the limits of an elementary work will allow, a just idea of each composer's personality, and to record the principal events of his life. Knowledge of what a man is helps the understanding of what he does. These little books may serve, therefore, as a first step towards acquaintance with the genius and composition of the masters to whom they are devoted.

For the copious extracts made from letters, &c., throughout the series, no apology is offered. They are the best material upon which to base an estimate of character.

LONDON & NEW YORK
NOVELLO, EWER AND CO.